

Gorbachev Rules Out 'Negotiations,' but Baltic Talks Advance

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 13—Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev today called the Lithuanian legislature's declaration of independence "illegitimate and invalid" and ruled out formal negotiations with the republic on secession from the Soviet Union.

But despite Gorbachev's hard-line statement in a speech to the Congress of People's Deputies, deputies from Estonia and Lithuania said that delegations from both republics would soon begin "discussions" with the Kremlin leadership in Moscow. Some said Gorbachev simply did not want to make those discussions appear to be formal, state-to-state negotiating sessions.

"The Lithuanians, as well as the Estonians and Latvians, have asked for negotiations," Gorbachev said. "There can be no question of negotiations. We only hold negotiations with foreign states."

Gorbachev said the leadership would soon make public its complete assessment of Sunday's decision by the Lithuanian legislature to "reestablish" the independence it lost in 1940 when the republic was annexed as part of a treaty with Nazi Germany. He said a committee in the full-time legislature, the Supreme Soviet, led by Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, would study the Lithuanian question.

Another member of the Kremlin leadership, Vice President Anatoly Lukyanov, told reporters that while there would be no negotiations, "there will be discussions."

Lithuanian leaders are convinced that the Soviet leader's position on what he called the illegitimacy of the republic's declaration is bound to shift.

Algimantas Cekuolis, a leader of the Sajudis independence movement in Lithuania and a deputy in the Congress of People's Deputies, said, "Gorbachev is a realist. He'll change his stand. Remember how he changed his stand on the reunification of Germany."

Cekuolis said that ever since the republic began its drive for independence 18 months ago, "every step in Lithuania always met with the same reaction in Moscow—'No! Never!' But then they considered things and accepted."

After a Lithuanian deputy read to the congress a copy of the declarations passed in Vilnius, Gorbachev began to address him with the traditional Bolshevik "Comrade . . ." Then he stopped himself and said, smiling, "Comrade? What sort of comrades? Well, OK, I think it's comrade, anyway."

Most of the Lithuanian delegation to the congress said they were attending only as "observers" and did not participate in the voting on presidential powers because "we shouldn't be voting for the presidency of a foreign country."

Latvian deputy Andres Plotnieks said that Gorbachev was engaged in a semantic game, and that whether they were called "negotiations" or "discussions" there had to be contacts soon.

"You can call them whatever you like, but there will have to be talks between the center and the repub-

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lics on the basis of equality and not dictation," Plotnieks said.

Gorbachev has actually been carrying on discussions with various Lithuanian leaders for months on the question of independence and secession. Last week, he told Lithuanian Communist Party leader Algirdas Brazauskas that the republic would have to pay Moscow about \$34 billion as a price for secession.

Gorbachev's advisers say that amount is based on Moscow's "economic contribution" to Lithuania ever since the annexation in 1940.

"They should pay us billions and billions."

— Sajudis deputy Algimantas Cekuolis

But Lithuanian leaders, including newly elected President Vytautas Landsbergis, say that it is Moscow that should pay Lithuania for the economic damage inflicted on it by the Soviet system and for the human cost of hundreds of thousands of deportations and executions.

The Lithuanians, as well as the Estonians, have prepared their own "bills" for Moscow. "They should pay us billions and billions," Cekuolis said. "But what would be a fair outcome is what is Lithuania's is Lithuania's, and what is Russia's is Russia's."

Gorbachev was willing to use the question of negotiations on independence as a bargaining tool to win over Estonian deputies on the vote on presidential powers. In private discussions Monday with the Estonian delegation, Gorbachev said, according to Estonian deputy Arnold Ruutel, "Let us consider that talks have already begun." In exchange, the Estonians said they would support the bill on the presidency.

For the most part, Lithuania's declaration won wide approval from the radicals in the congress but was criticized by the moderates and conservatives. When Gorbachev made his comment about only negotiating with foreign countries, there was applause in the hall.

One conservative, Veniamin Yarin, called the declaration "political mutiny." And Boris Gromov, the army general who led the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, said independence in the Baltic states would mean the loss of a "key route to the ocean" through the Baltic Sea and other strategic positions. "I can't say it wouldn't matter," Gromov said.

Two key liberal deputies, Vitaly Korotich, the editor of the liberal weekly *Ogonyok*, and Anatoli Sobchak, a Leningrad lawyer and academic, said the best solution would be a constitutional overhaul that would establish each republic's "voluntary" relationship with Moscow and would clearly define the specific procedures for secession.

Brazauskas, who was defeated in his bid for the presidency of Lithuania, said the only reason he voted for the declaration of independence was to avoid being called a traitor by Lithuanian voters. He said the move was probably "premature."